

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jan. 28, 2025

CONTACT

Mark Shields, mshields@wffmail.com

Gen Z Fears Clean Water Shortages, Displacement Due to Climate Change*74% of Gen Zers say climate change threatens the clean water supply in the U.S.*

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Jan. 28, 2025 — The Walton Family Foundation and Gallup released a new report today examining Gen Z's experiences with climate change and water issues, shedding light on their concerns about climate events and the potential impact on their generation's future. The research finds water issues top the list of Gen Z's climate worries, with individual perspectives shaped by diverse experiences and beliefs.

Of 12 climate-related issues measured in the study, majorities of Gen Zers express "some" or "a great deal" of worry about nine, including five related to water. This is true regardless of location, with water pollution and the health of fish and oceans ranking among the top three concerns in every U.S. Census region. While a majority of Gen Zers nationwide (61%) have reported experiencing a water-related climate issue in the past two years, water-related problems are more commonly reported by those in the Central and Western U.S.

When considering how these issues may affect their future, Gen Zers report concern about the availability of clean water and the potential need to relocate. Those who have experienced climate-related events at a higher rate are more likely to worry about these impacts. There are notable differences across demographic groups. Hispanic (36%) and Black (34%) Gen Zers are more likely than their White (27%) peers to have experienced unsafe tap water. They are also more likely to believe there will not be enough clean water for their generation to live in the future (41% of Hispanic and 34% of Black Gen Zers, compared with 24% of White Gen Zers). Adult Gen Zers are significantly more likely to worry about needing to move due to climate change compared with their 12- to 17-year-old counterparts (40% vs. 27%, respectively).

There is large-scale unity among young people on the importance of protecting water quality. Seventy-four percent of Gen Zers say it is "very important" to protect oceans, lakes and rivers from pollution, with another 19% saying it is "somewhat important." Gen Z acknowledges the adverse effects of climate change on water resources: 74% of Gen Zers say climate change impacts the amount of clean water available in the U.S. "somewhat" (47%) or "a great deal" (27%). There is solid bipartisan agreement on the inadequacy of current water protection efforts: Majorities of both Democratic (88%) and Republican (63%) Gen Z adults say the U.S. is "probably" or "definitely" not doing enough to protect water.

"Gen Z is united in their deep concern for water protection and availability, recognizing it as a critical issue that touches us all — regardless of where we live or who we are," said Moira McDonald, Environment Program Director at the Walton Family Foundation. "As we look to the future, there's a growing sense of urgency. Young people fear inheriting a world where clean water is scarce and climate change continues to worsen. We need to work on solutions to ensure clean, safe water remains accessible for generations to come."

Looking ahead, Gen Zers are pessimistic about the trajectory of climate change — 67% believe climate change will worsen in their lifetime. And rates of pessimism are about 10 percentage points higher among those who have recently experienced a climate-related issue such as flooding, drought or unsafe tap water. Among voting-age Gen Zers, majorities of both Democrats and Republicans believe it is very or somewhat unlikely that climate change will be stopped.

Methodology

Results are based on a Gallup Panel™ web survey conducted Aug. 6-14, 2024, with a sample of 2,832 12- to 27-year-olds from across the U.S. The Gallup Panel is a probability-based panel of U.S. adults. Data were weighted to match demographic targets of age, gender, education, race, Hispanic ethnicity and Census region for 12- to 27-year-olds, using the most recent five-year population estimates from the American Community Survey.

Twelve- to 17-year-old children, as well as some 18-year-olds, were reached through adult members of the Gallup Panel who indicated they had at least one child aged 18 or younger living in their household. The remaining 18- to 27-year-old respondents are members of the Gallup Panel.

For the total sample of 2,832 respondents, the margin of sampling error is ± 2.9 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Margins of error for subgroups are higher; selected subgroups are reported below. All margins of error reported are adjusted to account for the design effect.

About the Walton Family Foundation

The Walton Family Foundation is, at its core, a family-led foundation. Three generations of the descendants of our founders, Sam and Helen Walton, and their spouses, work together to lead the foundation and create access to opportunity for people and communities. We work in three areas: improving education, protecting rivers and oceans and the communities they support, and investing in our home region of Northwest Arkansas and the Arkansas-Mississippi Delta. To learn more, visit waltonfamilyfoundation.org and follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

About Gallup

Gallup delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 80 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of employees, customers, students and citizens than any other organization in the world.